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SUBJECT: PEACE COMMISSIONER REPORTS ON DISCUSSIONS WITH AUC
LEADERSHIP ON REACTIVATING DEMOBILIZATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)
Reftel: Bogota 9566

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On October 21, Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo briefed Ambassador and WHA/AND Director Phil French on his discussions with AUC leaders regarding conditions for reinitiating negotiations on future demobilizations. AUC negotiators were skeptical of resuming negotiations if the GOC treated them as it treated AUC leader Diego Murillo, AKA "Don Berna." In response to the AUC negotiators' petition for Don Berna to attend the next meeting, Restrepo thought that Don Berna's presence at the negotiating table would help reestablish confidence among the leaders. Restrepo warned that once demobilizations were rescheduled, they would likely extend to January or February. The Ambassador pushed back on inviting Don Berna back to the negotiating table and cautioned against allowing demobilizations to extend beyond the December 31 deadline since it would risk the credibility of and support for this process. End Summary.

REBUILDING TRUST WILL NOT BE EASY(

¶2. (C) Peace Commissioner Restrepo reported to the Ambassador and WHA/AND Director French that the October 20 meeting with AUC leaders was tense. AUC negotiators (Ramon Isaza, Julian Bolivar, and Ivan Roberto Duque, AKA "Ernesto Baez") were skeptical of the advantage of continuing talks given the GOC's decision to send Don Berna to a maximum-security prison. AUC negotiators said they no longer trusted President Uribe and considered his "stubbornness" worrisome. Restrepo also said that Uribe, in turn, had been unhappy with the Ambassador's criticism of the decision to suspend Don Berna's extradition.

¶3. (C) Restrepo explained that it has been hard to recover from the distrust sparked by Don Berna's imprisonment. Expressing frustration over all the work to convince the blocs to demobilize, Restrepo said he had finally managed to gather the paramilitaries and start "herding them to the corral" when Uribe "cracked the whip" and sent them

scattering, and it was going to be hard to bring them "back into the fold." For example, one of the biggest groups left to demobilize is the Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB), but its leader, Lorenzo Gonzalez, AKA "Macaco," while still interested in demobilizing, was nervous about what would happen to him and believed that the USG is "after him." North Bloc leader Rodrigo Tovar Pupo, AKA "Jorge 40," Hernan Giraldo, and Elmer Cardenas Bloc leader Luis Alfredo Berrio, AKA "El Aleman," are also ambivalent about demobilizing their blocs, worried that they will end up in prison if they do.

14. (C) Restrepo said he was concerned about the AUC's leadership, including its second-tier structures. His sources say that Jorge 40 had written a fatalistic letter to Macaco and other AUC leaders saying that the AUC negotiating hand is weak and Jorge 40 feared a rebellion by subordinate commanders, which could undermine the process. The AUC's historical leader and commander of the Mid-Magdalena Bloc Ramon Isaza has also indicated that his subordinates are fearful of what will happen to them and are therefore reluctant to demobilize.

(BUT DON BERNA AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE MAY HELP

15. (C) In response to the AUC negotiators' petition for Don Berna to attend the next meeting, Restrepo thought that his presence at the negotiating table, at least for one session, would help reestablish confidence among the leaders. He told the group that he would consult with Uribe before approving Don Berna's participation. Restrepo said that in his last conversation with Don Berna, the AUC leader expressed his

willingness to announce public support for the peace process and would make it clear to AUC negotiators that demobilizations must continue. Even though the GOC would be taking a risk by allowing Don Berna to participate temporarily, Restrepo thought the risk was small since Don Berna still has significant influence over the process and could help get the negotiations back on track.

PRISON CONDITIONS WERE ALSO DISCUSSED

16. (C) Restrepo said during the meeting with AUC leaders, he mentioned the GOC's recent trip to Switzerland to research alternative prisons that are based on a "dignity and rehabilitation" model. The AUC negotiators expressed interest in the model. Restrepo said that Organization of American States Verification Mission Director Sergio Caramagna, who attended the meeting, was astonished since it was the first time in his experience that prison conditions were discussed openly during such a delicate time of peace negotiations.

LIMITED REACTION ON IMMEDIATE REELECTION

17. (C) Restrepo mentioned that the Constitutional Court's approval of immediate reelection earlier that week was barely discussed. Despite the overall atmosphere of pessimism and mistrust during the meeting, Restrepo reported that a feeling of resignation reigns and that there is no other option but to move forward. It is preferable to negotiate with Uribe than the other current presidential candidates, the AUC leaders said.

DEMOBILIZATIONS DEADLINE LIKELY TO BE POSTPONED

18. (C) Turning to the timeline for demobilization, Restrepo told the Ambassador and French that it would be unrealistic to think that in less than two months they can demobilize the rest of the paramilitary blocs; once demobilizations are

rescheduled, they are likely to extend to January or February. Restrepo explained that what would determine the last date for demobilizations would be the election calendar and the availability of public forces to secure the areas where demobilizations take place. He reiterated the need for assistance in increasing security personnel by 10,000 in areas left by paramilitaries (reftel).

¶9. (C) Restrepo recognized the political cost of postponing the December 31, 2005 deadline, which he imposed during the Ralito talks in July 2003, but credited the deadline for the demobilization to date of over 11,000 paramilitaries. To hold to the deadline at this stage would hinder the GOC more than the AUC, in his view. Restrepo's biggest concern was the possibility that AUC leaders would strengthen their negotiating hand by banding together in the aftermath of Don Berna's incarceration. He emphasized that it was important to avoid giving them reasons to refuse to demobilize.

AMBASSADOR RESPONDS TO CHANGE IN DYNAMICS

¶11. (C) The Ambassador agreed with the need to prevent the AUC from re-forming a united front, but disagreed with bringing Don Berna back to the table or postponing the December 31 deadline for completing demobilizations. The Ambassador was also concerned with the attitude of "third generation" or subordinate commanders. It is important to salvage the negotiations to demobilize the paramilitaries, he said, but the government should not negotiate conditions as soft as for imprisoned ELN leader Francisco Galan in the hope of engaging every irreconcilable into the process. Postponing the December 31 deadline would risk the credibility of and support for this process.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador also warned that domestic and international tolerance for postponement of the peace and justice components of the process could undermine all the hard work to date. He reminded Restrepo that international assistance for this process is not just on demobilization, but verification, reinsertion, reparations, and justice. Extending the deadline opens the door for an indefinite delay. It is important, therefore, that the GOC try to do a better job of simultaneously treating peace and justice together. French recognized the difficulty of negotiating peace with the AUC while imprisonment and extradition hangs over their heads, but international confidence in the process is needed to avoid the perception that the process was allowing impunity.

WOOD